

“Left verses Right”

Mark 9:33-37

Party games. Just the phrase gives some visions of joy and others the shivers. Whether played at a child's birthday or an after-hours office shindig, it seems to me that party games are designed to make us look ridiculous and act silly. Like that Helen DeGeneres inspired game, *Heads Up*.

The rationale seems to be as follows: now that we've all been silly together, the ice is broken, people can get comfortable, and we can begin enjoying each other without pretensions and protocols. Party games are supposed to put people in a party mood.

And truth be told, if there's one party game that does an outstanding job of making participants look ridiculous, it's the dreaded limbo contest. It's far worse than the bunny hop because you have to go one at a time and everyone is watching. The whole point of the limbo is to make you fall on your backside in front of a group of onlookers.

Unfortunately, the better you are at bending over backwards and coming up again without falling flat, the more sensational and embarrassing your eventual failure will be. Even if you manage not to fall, the more obtuse the angle of your back, the more convoluted and comical your body is going to appear.

Face it. Even if you win a limbo contest, you lose your dignity and made yourself a laughingstock.

Outside the limbo party atmosphere, **nobody ever wants to know how low can you go**. We want our family income to go higher, the morale in the work place to soar. We want our relationship with our teenager to get better, not worse, and no one I know wants to drop deeper into depression.

We spend our whole lives, and huge amounts of energies, clawing our way UP. Especially in the USA where we pride ourselves in where we are compared to where you are. What parent doesn't hope their kids will be better educated, have more fulfilling careers, make more money, have more opportunities than they had?

Our conviction is that it can happen. And if we work hard enough it WILL happen. When the banker's son becomes a house-painter, or the lawyer's daughter works as a waitress, we may say nothing . . . but who among us hasn't whispered to themselves, “failure.”

There was a TV-movie called, “A Walk in The Park” that demonstrates just how angst-inducing it can be to be parents of siblings who seem to be underachievers. It's about a young man who was perfectly happy and fulfilled in his work providing a necessary service for Manhattanites.

He's a dog-walker. His embarrassed mother introduced him as an animal behaviorist. His financier brother keeps offering him jobs at his brokerage company. In the inevitable happy ending, the family finally accepts this underachieving, dog-walking son.

But only because he now owns the business and has expanded this thriving dog-walking business with dog-sitting and dog-training and dog-grooming. He's no longer a servant. He's now a redeemed and esteemed entrepreneur.

We choose class over community. As Daisy says in *The Great Gatsby*, "Rich girls don't marry poor boys." Didn't then. Don't now.

Jesus' words here in Mark, especially his passion prediction, show how ill-conceived the disciples' dreams actually were. Their anticipation of greatness is exposed as foolish and flawed. Their quarrel over who would be the greatest and get heaven's glory seat is dismissed by the looming reality of Jesus' inglorious death.

But Jesus doesn't just dash the ice-cream hopes of his disciples. Jesus shows them, gently at first but more firmly as he goes along, how they must learn to re-define greatness, how they must radically realign their concept of success and achievement, how they must totally rid themselves of ideas of class.

Jesus turned upside down everything the disciples thought making it means and changed what upright and upstanding looked like. Instead of glorying in his leadership, or assuming sweeping authority, or flexing his messianic muscles, Jesus lauds servanthood and insists that, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (verse 35). And when Jesus said be a servant to all, he really meant ALL.

To demonstrate allness he swept onto his lap one of the children in the household and instructed his proud disciples to welcome and to be a servant to society's leftovers and left-behinds like children - the most powerless, prestige-less, wholly insignificant members of society.

In this servanthood to the lowly and the left out, the disciples would be judged as the lowest of the low. But it was precisely at this low point, Jesus declared, that disciple-servants would encounter Jesus himself and "the one who sent me" (verse 37), God the Father himself.

How low will you go to meet your Savior and your God? How low will this church go to be right with those on the left - the left out, the left over, the left behind, the left standing?

Are we willing to give up the corporate security blanket for the insecurities of a seat-of-your-pants existence? Are we willing to pinch back profits in order to free-up funds for more significant charitable contributions?

Are we willing to live to serve others instead of living to be served? Are we willing to open our home and our heart, as well as our checkbook, to those left behind by our economic system? Are we willing to stain our carpets, and risk damage to our furniture, to do the right thing for those left out?

Jesus did. I see evidence of it in Christ's Last Will and Testament. Read it. And you'll see that Jesus left...

- His purse to Judas;
- His body to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus;
- His mother to John the Beloved disciple;
- His seamless robe to the soldiers;
- His peace to His disciples;
- His last supper to his followers;
- His baptism to new believers;
- His love to the children;
- His healing to the sick;
- His teachings to the hungry in mind and spirit;
- His church to society;
- His Gospel to the world;
- His hope for the hopeless;

- His presence with all of God's children.
How low will we go to do right by those on the left?